

Civil Rights Advisory Council

June 8, 2006
Meeting Minutes

Members Present: Christine Kaufmann, Chair; Dorothy Eck; June Hermanson; Jessie James-Hawley; Marilyn Kramer; Murray Pierce; Katie Stevens

Staff Present: Kathy Bean, of the Montana Office of Community Service

Absent: Linda Carlson, Ex. Dir. of the Montana Office of Community Service

Guests: Karl Olson (Ex. Dir.-PRIDE Inc.); Debbie Smith (Immigration-Attorney, Reynolds, Motl and Sherwood, PLLP); Diane Kersten (Board of Directors-Beth Aaron Congregation, Licensed Clinical Social Worker); Bernie Franks-Ongoy (Ex. Dir.-MAP); Robin Bissell (H.S. Psychologist); Meg M. Bennett (Investigator-HRB); Jan Siemers and Bob Campbell (private citizens)

The meeting opened with introductions of all present. Christine reviewed the following talking points of the Civil Rights Advisory Council; the sense of civil rights in Montana, the impact of policy on the next session, and how civil rights are affected in Montana. She informed the Council of the new Executive Director for the Office of Community Service, Linda Carlson who will staff the Citizens Advisory Council.

Murray Pierce provided a powerful presentation on "The History of Civil Rights." He informed those present about the presumption of liberty, backdrop of the Civil War, 13th, 14th, and 15th amendments, Jim Crow laws, and the new direction of civil rights.

An invited panel of guests addressed bias, discrimination and the importance of civil rights issues.

Karl Olson began by stating PRIDE's mission to secure civil rights of lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender Montanans. PRIDE provides educational outreach throughout the state and lobbies our legislature to write bills and/or change policies. He spoke of tolerance unless disclosure, the challenges of attitudes and Montana law not protecting individuals abused because of their sexual orientation. His recommendations to the Council were as follows; to read M.L.K's letter from the Birmingham jail, to encourage the Council to be bold, to keep advocacy groups involved, and to facilitate hearings around the state.

Diane Kersten explained to the Council what it is like to be a Jew in Montana. Diane categorized three forms of discrimination: non-intentional, intentional and hate crimes. She reminded the Council of the White Supremacy movement in Billings and the model of responding to discrimination, "Not in Our Town." Diane spoke of the importance of educating youth and Marilyn Kramer added that the Jewish community wants to have a sense of social justice.

Deb Smith advised the Council to visit the website, www.fairus.org to attain compiled statistics prevalent to immigration in Montana. She reported upon the 7,000 people today who are not U.S. citizens in Montana and that 2,500 are here illegally which is one of the lowest percentages in the nation. Deb explained that most employers wanted to support illegal immigrants but that sponsorship is extremely difficult. Deb stated the

following concerns of non-citizens: public safety, assimilation, and family unity. She asked the Council to protect the ability of the state to mandate effective policy.

Bernie Franks-Ongoy provided a handout on the Montana 2000 Census illustrating the number of people over 21 years of age with a disability. Bernie explained MAP's priorities; investigating institutionalized abuse and neglect, integration, discrimination of benefits and outreach. She stated that most services were free of charge and that the organization provided legal services for 1,000 cases this year. She suggested Council members read "Disability Rights Movement" to obtain an understanding of disability issues. Bernie's recommendations were; to not leave kids behind, gain local control of school boards and advocate for a centralized office to accommodate people within the state equally.

A resounding applause was given to all of the panelists. Discussion ensued on the vision of the Council. Most members agreed that the Council should listen for the Governor in order to make policy recommendations. Christine asked the Council if conversation should be limited to one topic, for instance, bullying. Murray stated that the Council might want to be involved in the policy of educating administrators and educators to bullying issues. Meg Bennett of the HRB interjected that bullying would qualify as a human rights filing on the basis of age. Further discussion included the monitoring of monies to reimburse travel, inviting staff from HRB to attend meetings and if it is possible to hold hearings. Kathy Bean will look into the cost of Met Net Conferencing and ensuring an invitation to HRB staff. Christine will look into the possibilities of obtaining a court recorder and emailing members to develop a direction of the Council.

Next meeting will be September 12th, 06, 11:00a.m. - 3:00p.m. with lunch served. Location has not been determined at this time.